













# HOW AUNT SAVANNAH SAVED THE DAY

By Margaret M. Page

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AUNT SAVANNAH HAMILTON was by far the most active and energetic negro in Pontonville. Unlike the majority of Florida negroes, who bank in idleness until an enemy larger or depleted wardrobe compels them to earn a little money, she was always ready to work. Her husband had been wont to consume a great part of her earnings in drink, but it was commonly reported that during the three years which had elapsed since his death she had accumulated a considerable sum of money. The excellence of her cooking brought her to constant demand when the little town was filled with northern boarders. She was also accounted the best singer in Pontonville.

Although she was fully fifty years of age and exceedingly stout the combined attractions of good cooking, fine singing and the possession of a bank account would have made her a formidable rival to the young girls of Egypt, the name commonly given to that part of Pontonville occupied by the colored people and chosen to enter the matrimonial lists. In fact she had received several offers of marriage, but had rejected all such propositions with intense scorn, saying that one husband was one too many for a sensible woman.

However, it began to be whispered about that since the arrival of Mr. James Pendergast, a tall young man from Georgia, the climate had been successfully attacked. James possessed a magnificent tenor voice, and when it rang out in "that mellow" above the other voices Aunt Savannah clasped her hands and tolled her eyes in ecstasy while her clear soprano was hushed in admiring silence. When James escorted Aunt Savannah home from meeting one evening, Mr. Pendergast observed to her, "Aunt Savannah, your married daughter."

"To be Lawd, Creasy," he said, "yeer man done got crotch at 'er" by dat Georgy sucker."

Aunt Savannah had lived alone in her one room cabin since the death of her husband. Near by stood the cabin in which Creasy lived with her husband and in a children. Both of these humble homes were shrouded by orange and lemon trees and in the plots of ground in the rear some cabbage were growing. Between the two houses a rudely constructed lean-to and a chicken yard surrounded by a slat fence seemed to receive more care than either of the gardens.

One day soon after the act of gallantry which had caused John Johnson's comment upon her, Aunt Savannah's cabin all day had been cleaning and cooking. As it neared sunset her labors appeared to be completed. The table covered with a snowy cloth and neatly set, stood in the center of the room. Bouquets of roses, honeysuckles, jacinths and oleanders arranged in cracked cups and pitchers stood in every available spot and filled the room with fragrance. On the hearth, where the fire had burned to a few embers, stood a platter of fried chicken, and the roasted sweet potatoes and corn pone were still covered with the ashes to keep them warm.

Presently Aunt Savannah emerged from behind the curtain which partitioned off one corner, used as a bedroom. She was dressed to do credit to the occasion whatever it might be. A black alpaca skirt and purple plush

basque finished at the neck by a broad lace collar, which was fastened by a large gold brooch, and a white apron, crisp and shining with abundant starch, set off to advantage the ample proportions of her figure. Large gold hoops depended from her ears and an orange silk handkerchief was bound in turban fashion over her head.

As she stood in the doorway shivering her eyes with her hand from the level rays of the sun Mr. James Pendergast appeared in sight.

James was also dressed for a great occasion. He wore nankin trousers, a red and green plaid waistcoat and a blue coat adorned with brass buttons. On his head was a much worn silk hat, and he jauntily carried an orange stick cane. As he approached Aunt Savannah greeted him with a deep courtesy. In acknowledgment he put his cane under his left arm, placed his right hand on his heart and with his right hand lifted his hat and nearly swept the ground with it as he bent low before her.

"Good evening, Mr. Pendergast," said she. "How does yo' an' yo'set dis evening?"

"Po'y, Miss Hamilton po'y. When er man picks oranges all de day long de prickin' ob de thawsen in de fragrance ob de blossoms min' a him pow'ful ob de sorrows ob a single life."

"I years tell, Mr. Pendergast, as how yo' an' yo'set ter gal up in Georgy."

"Well, Miss Hamilton, I owns as dere was a sort ob kin' ob ingamint," said James as he followed Aunt Savannah into the cabin in response to a courtly wave of her hand.

"Res' yo' hat on de flo' en draw a cheer ter de table, Mr. Pendergast."

As James seated himself at the table and placed his battered hat carefully

on the floor, Aunt Savannah moved to the door and looked out into the night. A month passed before Aunt Savannah had secured the dental ornaments which she considered so essential to her toilette. In the meantime James had given her the "leben dollars," which she had expended for furniture. On an evening in April the elite of Egypt were invited to attend the wedding. By that time the orange blossoms were nearly gone, but enough had been obtained to grace the occasion appropriately, and other flowers were abundant. A bower, beneath which the couple were to be married, had been built under the orange tree in front of Aunt Savannah's cabin. A table studded with flowers and loaded with trophies of Savannah's skill in cooking. The space between the bower and the table was devoted to dancing, and the fiddlers were already giving their instruments preliminary twangs, to the great delight of the arriving company. Aunt Savannah and James moved about among the guests, greeting them with graceful and elaborate speeches of welcome.

About the time when the guests began to arrive the train from Jacksonville stopped at the little station, and a young colored woman alighted and looked around. She was tall and thin and with snapping black eyes and a wistful expression. Walking up to the baggage agent, she asked him in a high, sharp voice:

"Does yo' know ob de wharabouts ob a gentleman which he name an' Jim Pendergast?"

"Yes, I know where he lives, but he won't be at home tonight," said the agent, with a grin.

"What am he, den? Dat's what I want ter know."

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"I'll speak ter Parson Davis ter-morrow."

at his feet he beamed approvingly at the vanda which Aunt Savannah hastened to set before him.

"Would yo' kin'ly peronice ob de bless in', Mr. Pendergast?"

With one partly closed eye on the chicken, James hurried through an elaborate blessing, ending with a sonorous "Amen" in which Savannah heartily joined.

"Tah some ob de orange marmalade en help yo'set ter de guaba jelly, Mr. Pendergast."

"Tank yo' m'es kin'ly, Miss Hamilton. An' dis jelly some ob yo' own pus-uvin'?"

"Bless de grashus, yes Mr. Pendergast. I alius does my own cookin'." Her stammered halts no longer. "Fancy yo' takin' in de contraptions what oder folks mouses inter. I 'spos' dat Georgy gal, a mighty scrumptious cook, now."

"Dat Georgy gal's needer yere nor dar en ain't ter be menshun in de same week wid some folks which p'aps I hadn't oder speak ob 'em."

"I 'spos' yo'll be bringin' her down yere befo' long?"

"Selah, Miss Hamilton, nebah I done make up my min' as how dat gal don't noways 'gree wid my con'stitutions."

"What's de matter wid her?"

"Well, fo' one ting, she hab a mos' owdshus up'arin' temper. When dat gal gits her mind up, de bull whell crea shun an' bleedin' ter stan' out fum um."

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The couple left the cabin and seated themselves under the orange trees, where for two hours they laughed and talked with the light heartedness of children.

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"In an' dat all, Mr. Pendergast," said Savannah as she handed her guest a cup of coffee.

"Well, not adackly all," he replied, inhaling the aroma of the coffee and then taking a large gulp, "not jes' in terms adackly, 't' it cost me lehen dollars ter bring dat gal yere. Mighty bark, breakin' wnk ter e'm lehen dollars pickin' oranges fo' ter git a gal wid a owdshus temper what sings like a tucky buzzard when dar am folks elus ter yere eller wid a smilen face which dey kin sing wid de molousness an' a song sparrow. De trufe am, Miss Hamilton, when I sees some oder folks which hab a 'spos' I hadn't oder menshun 'em my 'reckshuns fo' dat gal am pow'ful lekin'."

"'O de grashus goodness, Mr. Pendergast, do hab some mo' ob de chicken en amuder yam?"

"Tank yo' m'es kindly, Miss Hamilton, but befo' we percede furdur wid dis meal could yo' 'spon' ter my perose-mune ob de marmalade?"

"I 'faps I thought Mr. Pendergast, yo' gal 'gree ter spon' dat lehen dollars in fash' up de shanty."

"Dat I'll mos' sholy do, en I'll speak ter Parson Davis ter-morrow 'bout habin' de ob'sequies immedit."

"Mr. Pendergast, I mus' req'es de pos'honmune ob de ob'sequies terwel I gits mysel' a set ob store teef. I've sot up my heart on 'em en con'idat I tink ob bein' jus' howwid 'em."

"Miss Hamilton a woman which kin cook sich chicken en co' p'one as dese yere don't need no teef ter chaw. 'em wid en ob mouf which lets such hebenly sou's ob singin' out'n it as yorn does don't need 'em fo' beauty."

"Dar am no use ob aig'v'n' de matter. I'm sot put fast footed on habin' dem teef. Do presence ob de orange blossoms in de ha'r en de elusence ob de trobles in de mouf don't 'gree ter-gedder noways peraisute. When yo' han' me dat lehen dollars fo' ter fix up de shanty en my mouf am likewise sot out wid dem teef de percession 'll be ready ter move on."

"I reckon he's at Aunt Savannah Hamilton's, down in Egypt. He's to be married to her tonight."

"Married!" shrieked the woman. "De owdshus wilyin'! I'll stop dat business right spang off 'ere, yo' young raskill!" catching hold of a colored boy who stood looking on with open mouthed interest. "Take me to dat place dis minute, yo' knows what am good fo' yo'set. Start now. Don't gib no sand deas time ter hop under yo' feet wiles yo'set gwine." Away they went at a rapid pace, the boy impelled partly by curiosity and partly by fear of the virago who pushed him fiercely by the shoulder.

The guests were all assembled. Parson Davis, book in hand, stood beneath the bower, and Aunt Savannah and James were just taking their places in front of him when a furious woman burst through the crowd, shrieking "What's dat tapscallion, Jim Pendergast, who done clared out en left his true lub, which he done pious his 'leben dollars ter kin yere en be jine ter him?"

James dropped Savannah's hand and, turning round, cried wildly:

"De Lawd hab musky on us!"

"Ain't yo' musky, am yo'?" What musky hab yo' had on me yo' mizabelle, low down, no count nigger? Didn't I wuk my fingers ter de bone ter buy yo' dat ideenike suit ob deose yo' hab on?"

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